

Community Mural

The 1994 community mural idea became a reality in 1997. After 5,200 volunteer hours, two-years of painting, and a grant from the Wisconsin Arts Board, the beautiful mural was unveiled to greet visitors entering Viroqua from the south on Hwy 14. The mural is 8-feet high and 96-feet wide, and is located in the heart of downtown. It begins with a young girl blowing a thistle on an early spring morning, at sunrise, and ends with an elderly woman working on a quilt during a winter night.



Viroqua Mural

The project began with an application to the Wisconsin Arts Board for a \$5,000 grant. Part of these funds were used to hire Peggy Grinvalsky, a professional muralist, to conduct three training sessions on how to get started and what materials would be needed for this project. Twenty-five volunteers attended these evening sessions, including several teenagers.

Creating the design took several months. Every detail of the painting was researched, including the types of brick and the colors used in Vernon County's famous round barns. Hours were spent at the local museum searching through old photographs of people important to the community's history. Volunteers also spent time snapping pictures of sunrises, sunsets, leaves, and flowers for ideas for the design. Another group prepared the (24) 4-foot by 8-foot panels. Viroqua's Technical College donated a large room, which served as the "studio" for the two-and-a-half-year project. Each panel needed to be sanded, puttied, and primed three times. The design was then transferred using an overhead projector. Once the design was on the panels, the paint mixing began. The mural required three coats of paint in order to prevent oxidation, and three coats of sealer to protect it. The mural was attached to a building owned by Charles Dahl, Viroqua's Mayor at the time. He spent several thousand dollars getting the surface ready for the painting. The mural was unveiled on June 21, 1997. The celebration included music, dancing, and refreshments. The mural is expected to last 10 years without touch-ups. The mural would have cost \$65,000 if a professional had painted it. As a final project, the mural committee is going to write a handbook on the "do's and don'ts" of painting a mural for communities that are considering similar projects.

For more information, call the Wisconsin Main Street Program at (608) 266-7531.

